A

LETTER

FROM

RICHARD HILL, Esq;

TO HIS

FRIEND near SHREWSBURY,

CONTAINING

Some REMARKS on a LETTER signed A PLAYER.

Which LETTER is also prefixed.

SHREWSBURY:

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MDCCLXVII.

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Newport, Dec. 3, 1766.

SIR,

I DOUBT not but you will be ſurprized at the freedom of this addreſs from a ſtranger, and eſpecially as it is from one who ſtands in ſo unfavourable a predicament with you as the writer. But oppreſſion will always produce complaint.

As I neither ſolicit nor expect any favour from you, I ſhall take the liberty of ſpeaking very freely to you, and if you are that friend to truth you pretend, and would have the world believe you are, though what I ſay ſhould not be agreeable to you, you will not be offended at it.

I HAVE, ever ſince I knew there was a duty incumbent upon me to my Maker, in a particular manner with the moſt fervent gratitude returned my humble thanks to the beneficent and adorable author of my being, for giving me breath in a country where there is neither a *Spaniſh Inquiſition* to controul or direct my thinking, a *French Baſtile* to immure or impriſon me, or a *Turkiſh Baſhaw* to inſult or domineer over me. But, alas! I have lately experienced that in a land of liberty, enthuſiaſm can effectuate the work of tyranny, and an intemperate zeal when backed by power will often ſway the feelings of humanity. You will pardon me, Sir, when I tell you that you have diſtreſſed me, exquiſitely diſtreſſed me, by ſtrictly adhereing

to the letter of the law to oppreſs me, beyond what any other magiſtrate in the kingdom would have done. I know that *Vago* means a Vagrant; but is not he who ſhall throw aſide his laſt and awl, or his baſon and razor, and, puffed up with a ſpiritual pride, or ſtimulated by the hopes of lucre go wandering about from place to place, preaching in the fields, a vagrant, as much as the poor players that travel from town to town acting plays for a livelihood? which is the leaſt criminal, to traffic with the oracles of the Almighty, and make the word of God a ſtalking horſe for gain, or to entertain mankind with an innocent and rational amuſement for hire, tho' it happen to come within the letter of the law that may be conſtrued to prohibit it? To pretend to be more religious than other men, is like the *Phariſee* in the goſpel, making broad phylacteries, and is directly contrary to that divine precept of our immaculate Redeemer (pray in ſecret).

You, Sir, are a gentleman of a worthy and reſpectable family, have had your mind cultivated by a liberal education, and bleſſed with an affluent fortune; 'tis morally impoſſible you ſhould feel any of the evils of life (bodily infirmities excepted), how then can you prevail on your humanity to diſtreſs a whole body of poor people who are ſubject to all, who never injured or offended you,

and

and have their daily bread to ſeek before they eat it?

THE benevolent author of the religion you profeſs, the ever bleſſed Jeſus, in whoſe ſight we are all equal, has left upon record this poſitive command, "to love one another." Oh, Sir, if you ſhould ever be called in queſtion for this action, may your miſtake be your excuſe.

I CAN enumerate at this time forty companies of players that travel the country without moleſtation, beſides thoſe ſettled in the capital. Can playing then be *Malum in ſe?* if it were, would it be exhibited by authority? would the theatres be ſo often countenanced by the Royal Preſence? Would it be ſo much frequented by people of the firſt rank and underſtanding in the kingdom? Would ſuch eminent divines as Dr. *Hoadly*, Dr. *Young* and Dr. ~~*Brown*~~ *Hoadly* have contributed to the ſupport of the ſtage by writing for it? Or can the locality of a thing change its nature? can that be a crime in *Shropſhire* which is not elſewhere? certainly no. And it is an obſervation worthy the greateſt notice: That ſince the firſt introduction of the ſtage in *England* it has never been totally ſuppreſſed, but by thoſe abandoned miſcreants who murdered their Sovereign, changed the eſtabliſhed religion of their country, invaded the rights and plundered the property of their fellow-ſubjects, ſubverted and overturned the laws

of

of the land, and reduced the whole nation to a ſtate of anarchy and confuſion.

I WOULD willingly think with charity of your proceeding; but when I reflect on the cruelty of not only interdicting our performances, but baniſhing us the county without ſo much as inquiring if we had means to do it; I am almoſt perſuaded you could not do it for conſcience ſake, but from a ſpirit of perſecution; and that a warrant in the hands of an *Engliſh Enthuſiaſt* is as terrible a thing, as a letter de Cachet in the hands of a *French Bigot*; from both which may the good Lord deliver me.

WHAT you were pleaſed to mention concerning the dearneſs of proviſion making the time unſeaſonable, I take to be an argument greatly in our favour; our chief ſupport is from the gentry and people of fortune; we occaſion a circulation of caſh, which would otherwiſe lie idle, and almoſt every tradeſman where we perform is the better for it: The chandler, the baker, &c. all ſhare the profits of our labour; I have myſelf within theſe three years payed near 1000 *l.* to chandlers, carpenters and printers only; and even in this town, when your prohibitary letter was firſt made public, I heard a tradeſman exclaim, what can Mr. —— mean at ſuch a thing as this, will he pay our rent for us? As to the gentry altering the mode of their benefactions and giving that to the poor which they

they beſtow upon the players, I have nothing to ſay, they are the propereſt judges; you, Sir, undoubtedly know the extent of your authority, and if you have the power to oblige them to it, they muſt certainly ſubmit.

PERMIT me, Sir, with impartiality, to lay before you the ſtate of the people you have diſtreſſed: we came to this town with unblemiſhed characters, nay even recommended as deſerving encouragement, went to an extraordinay expence to entertain our benefactors in the beſt manner we were able, when we had ſcarce begun before your prohibition was received; we muſt not only deſiſt playing, but leave the county immediately: how did you know, Sir, it was practicable to obey you? I am myſelf in years, infirm, afflicted with two excrutiating maladies the ſtone and rheumatiſm; there were two women ſo big with child it is at the hazard of their lives to travel, and ſeveral young children.

BUT ſick or well your decree like that of the *Medes* and *Perſians*, is irrevocable; go we muſt, tho' poverty, miſery, diſeaſe and death are the conſequences; nay, ſo cruel are your orders, that the people where we lodged were threatened to be mulct if they continued to entertain us; the conſtables to be indicted at the next quarter ſeſſions if they did not drive us away, and all this from the impulſes of a religious feeling: fie, fie, Sir, reſiſt thoſe propenſities to inhumanity, they are

the

the diabolic illuſions of an evil ſpirit. Remember, the God that condeſcended to be a propitiatory ſacrifice for the ſins of all mankind, is the God of love and of mercy; inhumanity and chriſtianity are incompatible, one act of lenity has more merit than the repetition of a thouſand hymns and rhapſodies, tho' penned by a *Whitefield*, or a *Weſtley:* reſerve the gentleman and the chriſtian, and you will be an additional honour to your worthy family, you will be revered by your inferiors, eſteemed by your equals, honoured by your ſuperiors and reſpected by all mankind.

You may perhaps think that I have taken too much liberty in this letter, and treated you with an unbecoming freedom; but conſider, Sir, there will come a time when the juſtices and players will be upon a level, and I may boldly ſay to Mr. ——, Sir, you oppreſſed me, without fear of being ſent to the houſe of correction for it.

I AM, Sir, with all reſpect from one in my ſituation to one in yours, and all that fraternal affection that one owes another,

Your ſincere well-wiſher,

and humble ſervant,

A PLAYER.

P. S. We ſhould have obeyed your orders to a moment, had not the death of one of our women in childbed detained us.

Charity forbids me to make reflections, Oh, Mr. ——, O think.

A

LETTER

FROM

RICHARD HILL, Eſq;

TO HIS

FRIEND near SHREWSBURY,

CONTAINING

Some REMARKS on the foregoing LETTER.

Hawkſtone, May 20, 1767.

DEAR SIR,

HEARING that a letter, ſaid to have been wrote to me by a Player who was ſome time ago at *Newport*, had been very induſtriouſly and officiouſly handed about the county for ſome months paſt, curioſity inclined me to requeſt a peruſal of it, and it was accordingly conveyed to me by a friend ſomewhat above a fortnight ago, which (ſo far from its having been ever ſent me by the Player beforementioned) was the firſt time I ever had a ſight of it, and am credibly informed, that not the comedian, but one whoſe profeſſion ought to have taught him politer language

was the author of it.——Be that as it will, the contents are the ſame, though it muſt be allowed on all ſides that ſcurrility and falſehood come much more in character from the ſtrolling player than from the grave D——e. But where malice and envy are the dictators, where the pen is dipt in gall, and impotent rage guides the hand, what may not be expected from ſuch a combination?

To give the leaſt regard to compoſitions of this ſort, is to pay them a compliment they by no means deſerve, and makes the writers of them fancy themſelves of conſequence, when they are only the proper objects of compaſſion, but (to adopt the ſentiment of an able penman) what ſhall we ſay to a piece of which the groſs falſehoods and miſrepreſentations require an anſwer, and yet the rancour and abuſe with which it is ſtuffed render it worthy of nothing but contempt?

It was my own deſire and deſign not to have made the leaſt reply to my formidable adverſary, well knowing that every perſon of good ſenſe and candour would look upon his letter in the light it deſerved; and that as to others it mattered little what they thought either of him or me. He is none the better for their good opinion, and if he is, he is welcome to it. I am none the worſe for their bad opinion, or if I could be ſo, they have my hearty forgiveneſs in return.

I HAVE, however, at length ſo far yielded to the ſolicitations of a few friends as to take up my pen, in order to make public the exact ſtate of the caſe to which the letter writer alludes; and this I hope to do in a ſhort compaſs, as it is my intention to paſs by all the abuſe (which at a moderate computation may take up near three parts of my good friend's epiſtle, and in which I readily yield him the victory) and to mention only thoſe things which a moſt outrageous miſrepreſentation of facts, and a wide deviation from truth have gloſſed over with a ſpecious aud plauſible appearance.

To the beſt of my remembrance, about *November* laſt, a company of ſtrolling players came to *Newport*, and there ſet up their ſtandard with as much aſſurance as if neither law nor juſtice could controul them, or as if an act of parliament had paſſed in their behalf. Here they had not been above a week, before ſome of the ſenſible and thinking part of the town begun to be apprehenſive of the ill conſequences which muſt enſue if they were permitted to continue: Hereupon I had two applications by letter, ſignifying, that it was the earneſt deſire of ſeveral reputable perſons belonging to *Newport*, that I would uſe my authority to make the players leave the town; and one tradeſman in particular told me, that his juſt debts remained unpaid by ſuch as nevertheleſs could find money

enough to ſquander away at the play. But the perſons who thus applied to me, deſired I would keep their names ſecret (which I promiſed to do) leſt it might injure their buſineſs among ſuch as were encouragers of the players, and leſt the rabble, and *certain lewd fellows of the baſer ſort*, which were all of the ſtrollers' ſide, ſhould break their windows or do them ſome injury. Add to this, that I was informed by two ladies who came on a viſit here about the ſame time, that ſome women in *Newport* had actually ſold or pawned their cloaths, and almoſt ſtarved their children, in order to ſcrape up money for the play, to the no ſmall grief of their induſtrious huſbands; and this at a time when all ſorts of proviſions were ſo dear that many poor families were periſhing for want of bread, and when I had but a ſhort while before received a petition from the gentlemen of *Whitchurch* deſiring me to forbid a company of players from coming to that place, though the maſter of them had offered to act, what is called a charity play for the benefit of the poor. But we are forbidden *to do evil that good may come*.

I MUST have been inhuman indeed, as much ſo as the letter writer repreſents me, could I have heard theſe things with indifference, without feeling and ſympathizing with the diſtreſſes of my poor fellow-creatures, and without exerting the authority com-

committed to me for their redreſs. And, notwithſtanding the indecent reflections which the letter writer caſts upon the whole body of magiſtrates throughout the nation, by repreſenting them as *bearing the ſword in vain*, ſitting idle and inactive while forty companies of ſtrollers in defiance of the laws of the land go rambling about the country indulging themſelves in idleneſs, inſtead of being uſeful members of the community, and at once corrupting the minds and draining the purſes of all who are ſilly enough to frequent their performances; I ſay, notwithſtanding theſe indecent reflections upon ſo reſpectable a body of men, I can hardly think there is a magiſtrate in the kingdom who would have refuſed to ſtir himſelf in the like circumſtances; and I muſt ſpeak it to the honour of *Shrewſbury* in particular, that conſidering the ſize and affluence of the town, and how many genteel people there are in it, I believe there is more rarely a company of players ſuffered there than in any other place in *England*. The worthy magiſtrates and gentlemen of that town are ſufficiently ſenſible of the pernicious conſequences which too often reſult from permitting ſuch gentry among them; how many debts are frequently left unpaid, how many diſeaſes left uncured, how many pockets emptied, how many minds corrupted, how many apprentices and ſervant-maids commence *Othellos*, *Deſdemonas*, *Altamonts*,

tamonts, *Caliſtas*, Lady *Wrongheads*, Lady *Betty Modeiſhes*, Mr. *Fribbles*, *Roman Emperors*, *Tragedy Queens* and what not, to their high improvement in the arts of debauchery, intrigue, diſſimulation and romantic love, the great loſs of their time and neglect of their maſters' buſineſs; and this paſſion for acting and repeating plays often continues a long while after players have left a town, ſo that there is no ſaying where the infection will ſtop. Others again (one ſad inſtance of which was told me by a gentleman of great veracity) by their attendance on plays adopt the heroic notion of ſelf murder, and rather than cowardly bear the evils of life, or the thought that *Damon* or *Phillis* ſhould prove falſe, learn to poiſon themſelves with the deſperate courage of a diſappointed *Romeo*, or to ſtab themſelves with all the grace of a *Cato* or a *Juliet*.

And I muſt alſo add in favour of the ladies of the ſame place, that I would charitably hope the little encouragement given to players at *Shrewſbury* is owing to the ſtrict regard they pay to the rules of virtue and decorum, eſpecially when I reflect that moſt of our favourite comedies are ſtuffed with ſo many oaths and ſuch horrid obſcenities, that a modeſt heathen would have bluſhed to hear them: Not to mention others wherein the moſt awful texts of ſcripture, and

ſeveral

ſeveral parts of the public offices of our excellent church are turned into ridicule as the chimeras of a blind enthuſiaſt. How then can I entertain ſuch an opinion of any woman of character, as to ſuppoſe ſhe can contribute her money which might be ſo much better employed, to hire a gang of poor unhappy abandoned wretches to ſhock her ears with ſuch loads of blaſphemy and ribaldry.

But notwithſtanding the earneſt application I had received from *Newport* to deliver them from the burden of the players, and notwithſtanding the melancholy repreſentations that were laid before me of the diſtreſs of ſeveral familes in that place, ſome members of which would nevertheleſs attend the players: I ſay, notwithſtanding this, inſtead of ſending my warrant for bringing theſe ſtrollers immediately before me (which had I acted according to the letter of the law I might, and indeed think I ought to have done) that they might have no cauſe to ſay I had not allowed them opportunity to pack up their baggage, &c. I wrote to the conſtables to give them notice to quit *Newport* in a week. This notice was treated with contempt, and the players never offered to move at the expiration of that time. Hereupon I ſent my warrant to bring them before me, and ſummoned the people who harboured them, as the act directs; but at the ſame time, being willing

willing to proceed with all the lenity I poſſibly could, notwithſtanding the affront they had put upon my notice, I ſignified to the conſtables, that if the players would depart quietly in another week, they might ſuſpend the execution of my warrant till then, but if they would not go by that time, that they ~~might~~ must bring them before me, which if they refuſed to do they would be indicted at the next ſeſſions. For this act of mildneſs I was juſtly blamed by ſome of my worthy brother juſtices of this diviſion, who told me that I had given up my authority too much, and that I certainly ought to have committed the whole body of them to the houſe of correction for their abominable impudence, in refuſing to leave *Newport* upon my former notice, and treating it with the diſdain they did.

A FEW days after my warrant went to the conſtables, a fellow (and by the bye a very inſolent one) came over to *Hawkſtone* with a liſt of names from *Newport*, but of whoſe writing I cannot tell, deſiring the players might ſtay three weeks longer. I aſked him who he was: He conſidered a little while, and then told me ſome name which I have forgot, and that he was an inhabitant of *Newport*: However, a perſon who met him near the houſe and knew him, ſaid that he was one of the ſtrolling players. And I was afterwards informed that his real name was *Newton*.

This

This man I treated with all the civility I could, aſked him to come into the parlour, deſired him to ſtay and dine, and remonſtrated with him (not ſuſpecting who he was, or that he had told me any lies) upon the bad effects which muſt attend a company of idle ſtrollers in a ſmall country town. Moreover, I gave him to underſtand, that though a magiſtrate might connive at them, yet that it was in no magiſtrate's power to give them an actual permiſſion to ſtay, eſpecially when application had been made to him to put the law in execution. He then told me, that a family or two among them was not in a condition to move on account of illneſs, and to the beſt of my remembrance mentioned that a woman among them (a lady he called her) was either lately brought to bed, or in daily expectations of being ſo, and therefore hoped the company might continue a little while longer. Hereupon I conſented to let them ſtay eight days more, which was upwards of three weeks from my firſt notice, during which time the laudable motive of oppoſing the enthuſiaſtic juſtice filled their houſe every night; and (tho' I am unwilling to mention it) I privately ſent a guinea to the ſick woman, leſt ſhe ſhould be in want of any thing neceſſary for one in her ſituation, and ſaid, that if the others went away, I ſhould not deſire that family to move but at their

own convenience. This ſmall benefaction was received, but no thanks returned; however, inſtead of theſe, it was reported that my *dread commands* had killed a pregnant woman or two; though I was informed, that the perſon who died in childbed had acted for near three weeks after my firſt notice, and had continued to do ſo till within a night or two of her lying-in.

But the letter writer is not contented with pouring upon me ſuch a torrent of bitterneſs and abuſe as never came out of the mouth of a *Bilingsgate* fiſh-woman, he proceeds to defend plays and players upon principle; and urges, that playing cannot be *Malum in ſe*, becauſe countenanced by people of the firſt rank and underſtanding in the kingdom.

I am bound to hope that this is the reaſoning of the comedian, not of the C——n. Alas! if pity did not here become us rather than laughter, who could forbear ſaying to ſuch logic *riſum teneatis*.—— A wonderful poſition indeed, that a thing cannot be *malum in ſe*, becauſe countenanced by people of high rank!——But I can produce a ſad liſt of perſons of the higheſt rank who openly run into all exceſs of riot, and make no ſecret of their living in uncleanneſs, gaming, luxury, and the utter neglect of all religion. But theſe things cannot be *Malum in ſe*.——Wherefore? truely becauſe they

they are done by people of the firſt rank and underſtanding.

But though this argument is confuted by being mentioned, yet let us not refuſe to give it a more full and particular anſwer, and even to knock it down by its own weapons.

Playing cannot be *Malum in ſe*, becauſe countenanced by people of high rank and underſtanding. But if people of high rank and of great underſtanding did not ſee the evil conſequences of ſuffering ſtrolling players to go idling about the kingdom, why did the legiſlature in his late majeſty's reign include them in the vagrant act? Why is there a penalty of forty ſhillings on every houſe that harbours a ſtrolling player, and a reward of ten ſhillings to any perſon who apprehends one and brings him before a juſtice of the peace, who if he was to act up to *the letter of the law*, might order every player to be publicly whipped by the conſtable, or elſe commit them to the houſe of correction, or paſs them to their legal ſettlements?——Does the letter writer imagine that the king, lords, and commons did not know what they were about when they paſſed this act? Or that they had not the good of the nation at heart? And if they had, they muſt certainly look upon a gang of ſtrolling players as a public nuiſance and peſts of ſociety, otherwiſe they would hardly have ranked them among idle diſorderly perſons,

and rogues, and vagabonds. So that in fact all the letter writer's harangue upon the *lawfulneſs* of a ſtrolling player's profeſſion, is no better than an inſolent libel againſt the wiſdom of the king, lords, and commons for declaring it *unlawful*. And to reflect upon a magiſtrate as an inhuman enthuſiaſtic tyrant, worſe than a *Turkiſh Baſhaw*, or *Spaniſh Inquiſitor*, as having laid aſide the chriſtian and the gentleman, and being under the diabolic deluſions of an evil ſpirit for putting thoſe laws in execution which he is bound by oath to obſerve, is ſuch a pitch of matchleſs petulancy as perhaps the like never was, and I hope never will be heard of. For to grant the utmoſt the letter writer would have granted, it can only amount to this, that I ordered a company of ſtrolling players to leave the county; and if herein I degraded the characters either of the chriſtian, the magiſtrate or the gentleman, I never deſire to be thought any of the three; and will add, that I hope I ſhall never act otherwiſe as long as I live.

As to what the letter writer alledges of my diſtreſſing the players, and of my great cruelty and inhumanity towards them, tho' I am convinced that every reader will ſee that this is a moſt abominable falſehood, and that they were treated with uncommon lenity and tenderneſs, yet ſuppoſing all he ſays to be true, how am I blame worthy on this

this account? Muſt public laws give way to private convenience? If ſo, what law would ever be put in execution, ſince every law muſt be inconvenient to thoſe againſt whom it was made? Yet this fellow has even the impudence to call me to an account for not inquiring whether it was convenient to him to leave *Newport*. Was a felon to tell me when I was about to commit him to goal that it was inconvenient to him to go, and that I ſhould greatly diſtreſs him and his family by ſending him there, muſt I upon that account let him ſteal on, and ſuſpend the execution of the law till it would be convenient to him to go to goal? If ſo, what a ſtate of *anarchy* and *confuſion* indeed ſhould we ſoon ſee all around us? Yet herein conſiſts the force of our letter writer's argument, and it is exactly of the like kind with thoſe which have often been urged to me againſt the ſuppreſſion of diſorderly alehouſes, when I have found that for the ſupport of one idle alehouſe-keeper perhaps twenty poor families have been ruined and brought to the pariſh. Truly, the plea generally is, what will become of the poor man that keeps the alehouſe, he is now fit for nothing elſe? So that by all means he muſt get fat by his neighbour's ſins, and not be kept by the pariſh himſelf, how many ſoever be caſt upon it through the tipling and drunkenneſs ſuffered in his houſe. If

a man who got his bread by ſelling poiſon was to apply to a magiſtrate for a permiſſion to vend this poiſon publicly, or to bring ſome infectious diſtemper with him into a place, it would by parity of reaſoning be a very inhuman act in that magiſtrate if he refuſed to let him continue in the place, eſpecially if the poor poiſoner had been at a great expence in printing his bills and furniſhing his ſhop.——But I am inclined to think that the letter writer (ſuppoſing the player was really the author it) would not have accuſed me of cruelty, if the whole country might have been fleeced and ſtarved and their morals corrupted for the ſupport of himſelf and his fellow vagabonds.

But it is an obſervation worthy the greateſt notice (ſaith our author) " that ſince the " firſt introduction of the ſtage in *England*, " it has never been totally ſuppreſſed, but by " thoſe abandoned miſcreants who murdered " their ſovereign, changed the eſtabliſhed " religion of their country, invaded the rights " and plundered the property of their fel- " low-ſubjects, ſubverted and overturned the " laws of the land, and reduced the whole " nation to a ſtate of anarchy and confu- " ſion."

It were to be wiſhed that men would be ſparing of opprobrious names againſt their worſt enemies; much more that they would be cautious how they threw them upon perſons

ſons eminent for their piety, learning and diſtinguiſhed ſtation of life; and ſuch were many of thoſe illuſtrious patriots who are by our letter writer abuſed by the appellation of abandoned miſcreants, plunderers, &c. men who boldly ſtood up in defence of their religious and civil liberties, moſt of whom at the time of that neceſſary prohibition of the theatres on account of the troubles the nation was then involved in, little thought of, much leſs approved of the change which afterwards was eſtabliſhed in the diſcipline of the church, and abhorred with a perfect abhorrence that execrable act of murdering their ſovereign.

But ſuppoſe this prohibition had actually come from thoſe who imbrued their hands in their monarch's blood? What would this have proved, but that very bad men might do a very good act? And if we will find fault and abuſe as *abandoned miſcreants* and *plunderers* all ſuch as have held players in the moſt infamous light, then what muſt we think of his late majeſty and his two houſes of parliament, for ranking them in the liſt of rogues, vagabonds, and incorrigible rogues? And what excuſe can we make for almoſt every nation in Chriſtendom, in very few of which players are allowed chriſtian burial? And the church of *Scotland* ſtill maintains ſo great a regard to her primitive purity in this reſpect, that if any miniſter

niſter of that church was to be ſeen at a play, he would not eſcape the ſentence of excommunication. Beſides, who that has read any thing of eccleſiaſtical hiſtory does not know, that in the firſt ages of the church, for any one profeſſing chriſtianity to be ſeen at the public theatre, was looked upon as renouncing the holy religion of Jeſus? And I ſuppoſe, nay it is certain, that few of the ancient plays excelled or came up to the generality of modern ones for their horrid obſcenities and impieties.

"OH but, ſays the letter writer, if playing were *Malum in ſe*, would ſuch eminent divines as Dr. *Young*, Dr. *Trapp*, and Dr. *Hoadly* have contributed to the ſupport of the ſtage by writing for it?"

DR. *Young* was certainly a great and good man, and though his play was of a very different tendency from the common ſort, yet he lived to repent of what he had done.—— As to Dr. *Trapp*, if his name and example will do the letter writer's cauſe any good, he is heartily welcome to both. With regard to the Rev. Dr. *Hoadly*, as I never heard of his having wrote any thing for the ſtage, or in the defence of it, I am inclined to think there is ſome miſtake in the name, and ſhall therefore paſs it over in ſilence.

BUT are there no eminent divines who have delivered their opinions concerning the ſtage in other terms? Will not the teſtimonies

nies of archbiſhop *Tillotſon*, biſhop *Burnet*, and the learned Dr. *Edwards*, carry as much weight with them as thoſe before-mentioned? Now hear what the firſt of theſe ſays, concerning the generality of our modern plays, in his ſermon on corrupt communication:

" I ſhall now ſpeak a few words concern-
" ing plays, which, as they are now ordered
" among us, are a mighty reproach to the
" age and nation; as now the ſtage is, they
" are intollerable, and not fit to be permitted
" in a civilized, much leſs a chriſtian nation.
" They do moſt notoriouſly miniſter to in-
" fidelity and vice.—— And therefore I
" don't ſee how any perſon pretending to
" ſobriety and virtue, and eſpecially to the
" pure and holy religion of our bleſſed
" Saviour, can, without great guilt and open
" contradiction to his holy profeſſion, be
" preſent at ſuch lewd and immodeſt plays
" as too many are, who yet would take it
" very ill to be ſhut out of the community
" of chriſtians, as they would moſt certain-
" ly have been in the firſt and pureſt ages of
" chriſtianity." *Tillotſon.*

Bishop *Burnet*, in his preface to that excellent little book, the life of God in the ſoul of man, has theſe words:

" What ſhall be ſaid of thoſe conſtant
" crowds at plays, eſpecially when the ſtage
" is ſo defiled with Atheiſm and all ſorts of
" immorality, but that ſo many perſons know

" not how to fill up ſo many hours of the
" day, and therefore this contrivance muſt
" ſerve to waſte them, and they muſt feed
" their eyes and ears with debauching objects
" which will either corrupt their minds,
" or at leaſt fill their imaginations with very
" unpleaſant and hateful repreſentations. As
" if there were not a ſufficient growth of
" ill thoughts ready to ſpring up within us,
" but they muſt be cultivated and improved
" by art."

DOCTOR *Edwards* (who lived in the reign of queen *Ann*) in his celebrated book entituled the Preacher, p. 100, gives the following advice to the court and city clergy:

" THOSE preachers whoſe charge is about
" the court or in the great city, cannot
" ſhew themſelves faithful in their office,
" unleſs they diſſwade their hearers from
" frequenting play-houſes. And for this
" purpoſe they are obliged to repreſent to
" them the apparent miſchiefs of thoſe
" places, the pernicious conſequences of af-
" fecting that ſort of paſtime, and how in-
" conſiſtent it is with that ſeriouſneſs and
" gravity, that ſobriety, moderation and ſelf-
" denial which become the votaries of chriſ-
" tianity. They ſhould let them know, that
" no recreations and diverſions are to be
" uſed, but ſuch as are harmleſs and law-
" ful, and that theſe entertainments of the
" theatre as they are now managed and

" uſed

" uſed, are not of that ſort, becauſe of their " natural and unavoidable tendency to that " which is ſinful and unlawful; for they " foment idleneſs and profuſe waſting of pre- " cious time, they diſſolve the ſpirits into " lightneſs and wantonneſs, they foſter im- " modeſty and obſcenity, they nouriſh li- " centiouſneſs and debauchery, they encour- " age profaneneſs and impiety. The youth " eſpecially of both ſexes who are the grow- " ing hopes of the nation, are corrupted " and ruined by theſe public ſhews, and " almoſt every day affords us ſome proof of " it. In ſhort if your auditors be adicted " to plays, they will not care for your ſer- " mons, unleſs the ſermons be akin to the " plays."

" But to pretend to be more religious " than other men (ſays the letter) writer is " like the *Phariſees* in the goſpel, making " broad their phylacteries, and is directly " contrary to that divine precept of our im- " maculate Redeemer (pray in ſecret).

If my Religion conſiſts in pretence only, ſo much the worſe for me; but if really to deſire a growth in grace and holineſs beyond that which paſſes current for religion in the world be ſtigmatized for a fault, then I ſhould be very willing to amend it, if the ſcripture did not tell us, *that wide is the gate, and broad is the way which leadeth to deſtruction, and* MANY *there be that go in thereat,*

becauſe ſtrait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth to life, and FEW *there be that find it**. That *the friendſhip of the world is enmity with God* †. That *if any man love the world, the love of the father is not in him* ‡. That *ſhe that liveth in pleaſure, is dead while ſhe liveth* §. That *we cannot ſerve God and mammon* ‖. That *if any man will be Chriſt's diſciple, he muſt deny himſelf, take up his croſs daily and follow him* ¶. That *if we were of the world, the world would love it's own, but becauſe we are not of the world, but Chriſt hath choſen us out of the world, therefore the world hateth us***. I ſay, if theſe and the like expreſſions were not in the word of God, then I might acquieſce with our letter writer, that to be more religious than other men is only to ape the *Phariſees* in the goſpel; but when thoſe lips which cannot lie, aſſure me, that except our righteouſneſs exceed the righteouſneſs of the *Scribes* and *Pariſees* we cannot enter into the kingdom of God; then I muſt beg leave to differ with him in my ſentiments, and to reſt in this concluſion, that as that religion which pleaſes the world will never pleaſe God, conſequently that religion which pleaſes God, will never pleaſe the world.

BUT

* Matt. vii. 13, 14. † Jam. iv. 4. ‡ 1 John. ii. 15. § 1 Tim. v. 6. ‖ Matt. vi. 24. ¶ Matt. xvi. 24. ** John xv. 19.

But does not our immaculate Redeemer ſay, "Pray in ſecret?" He does. But who, except one who had ſtudied plays much more than chriſtianity, would draw any other inference from hence, but this; *Pray in ſecret*, that you may let your light ſhine in public, and that the ſpirit and temper of your private prayers may be carried into the outward conduct of your lives and converſation. And I will venture to affirm, that it is much better never to pray in ſecret at all, than to leave our religion and prayers in our cloſet together, and to riſe from our knees and to live after the courſe of this world; for then prayer is nothing elſe but a ſolemn mockery of him who regardeth not the ſervice of the lip and knee whilſt the heart is far from him.

But I have extended my letter to a length I little thought of when I began it. I ſhall therefore only beg pardon for having intruded ſo long upon your patience, and ſubſcribe myſelf,

Dear SIR,

Your every affectionate friend, &c.

Richard Hill

P. S.

P. S. THAT it may not be ſaid I have made any unfair repreſentation of my antagoniſt's epiſtle, I thought proper to prefix it and print it with my own; though I am informed it has already made its appearance in one of the evening papers: but as I have had another copy of it ſent me lately, which differs from the firſt in one of the names of thoſe divines who are ſaid to have wrote for the ſtage, and I know not which is the right, if therefore the prefixed letter ſhould in a word or two vary from the original, I hope it will be attributed to miſtake, as in ſubſtance they are both the ſame.

I AM inclined to think, there is an erratum in the letter ſigned a Player, for he ſays, he concludes with all reſpect; ought he not rather to have ſaid, with all *diſreſpect*?

BRITISH
14 JY 74
MUSEUM

THE END.